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(Justice)

Budget Impacts on the Department of Justice

Justice Minister, Chris Decker, today announced the impact of the provincial government's budget for the 1996-97 fiscal year on the Department of Justice. This year's budget focuses on the Support Enforcement Program, the provincial component of the RCMP and on the Provincial Court System.

"Throughout our decision-making," said the minister, "we have focused on maintaining safety and service to the public as our top priorities. This fiscal year will see an increased enforcement of child support payments, a continued emphasis on providing essential police services to our citizens and the streamlining of our court system without reducing services."

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has provided increased funding to the Child Support Enforcement Program which will allow three more enforcement officers to be hired. This will bring much needed attention to a caseload which has been increasing by 13 per cent per year since the program was introduced in 1989.

"Tracking debtors is often difficult and time consuming when over 1,000 non custodial parents reside outside the province," said Mr. Decker. "Government has recognized this and, I am pleased to say, has made increased enforcement of this program a priority."

In the area of policing, government has continued to recognize essential services and continues to maintain its police operations through the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. However, as a result of today's provincial government budget announcement, the RCMP in Newfoundland and Labrador has had to restructure some of its operations across the province. This restructuring will occur mainly in highway patrol, customs and excise operations, and by introducing Store Front Community Policing Offices to replace full service detachments in four locations, namely in the Grand Falls/Windsor-Botwood-Buchans area, the Marystow-St. Lawrence-Grand Bank area and the Happy Valley/Goose Bay-Cartwright-Mary's Harbour-Forteau area of Southern Labrador.

The Provincial Court system has also seen some administrative reorganization while continuing to focus on maintaining judicial services across the province. Offices in Woody Point and Port aux Basques will now be closed and those administrative functions will be transferred to central court locations. Judicial services will continue in those areas, which will remain part of the circuit court system. The Provincial Court administration office in Wabush will become a half-time operation, and judicial services will continue to be delivered on circuit at that location as well.

"The decisions we have announced today were difficult ones," said the minister. "However safety and service to the public continue to remain our top priority. We had to determine the areas where we could reorganize and minimize inefficiencies while still maintaining an acceptable level of service to the public."

"For example," continued Mr. Decker, "the RCMP will continue to focus their highway patrol on those areas with the highest traffic flow. Customs and excise operations will still be maintained federally even though we have reduced the provincial component, and the Store Front Community Policing Offices being introduced will ensure those communities affected will continue to have core service delivery personnel remain in the community. Administrative duties will be transferred to a central

location."

"In regards to the Provincial Court System," said the minister, "we have done our best to ensure the most important services remain in the communities. Administratively we have identified inefficiencies, thereby transferring non judge-related functions of the court such as payment of fines and the filing of court documents, to central locations. All these services will continue to be available by way of visit, telephone, fax or mail at the nearest court location."

Contact: Susan Laite, Assistant Director of Public Relations, 729- 0110

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